

That Inevitable Fall

As kids, we all know just how absolutely indestructible our parents are. The rock in the storm, the bastion in which we seek shelter from the turbulence of our lives; our parents. However strong they may be, just as we all come to the shocking realization of the Santa Claus myth, there is a point in time when that the illusory wall of parental invincibility comes crashing down. For me, that moment came in the summer of 2009, when my family went to get some extra hay bales moved into a barn at our house. Bailing hay is a process of driving a tractor with a bailor and trailer across rows of cut alfalfa, clover, and other plants that livestock enjoy devouring, and having it compacted into rectangular, 40-60 pound bales that the people standing on the trailer stack while on the move.

We went over to the property that neighbors my grandparent's home, a property that was co-owned by my father and his sister, my aunt; land that was vastly composed of a large hay field that was obscured by the house and line of trees that spread out from the artificial fence of Oaks and Pines separating the two yards. No one lived in the house, and it was almost completely filled with the amassed junk of my grandfather's and the old furniture of our entire family, collecting dust and attracting the attention of vermin looking for new places to call home. My father parked the dust-covered, dull-red van in front of a decrepit garage built right in front of the open field. We slowly clambered out into the loud wind of that warm summer afternoon, and we made the usual conversation of a nuclear, middle-class family of rural pedestrians doing work: my father insisting the work would not take long, the annoyed chimes of my sister,

indignant at having been pried away from whatever it is 8 year olds do in summer, and my mother making placating suggestions as the family peacekeeper.

Making our way around to the field where the last trailer was parked, my mother, sister, and I waited for my father to get into the rusty black truck that we had left there the day we baled the hay in order to hook it back to the wagon and haul it to our family's barn, where it would be tossed and stacked into a poor, decaying excuse for a wooden building by all of us, working in the kind of synchronized yet disorganized way families tend to do. When we had finally made certain that the truck was attached to the trailer, my father got out to double-check the ropes that had been holding the bales on top of the wagon for the better part of two days, so as to not cause any accident on the road on the way back. Lounging around, waiting for my father to finish up, I lazily looked up into the slightly cloudy day, listening to the wind and the light sound of my sister's complaints mixing together to form the calming nothingness of so much white noise. Not a worry in my head. Then, a sickening and heavy thud. A short groan of pain and confusion was heard from behind, me, right by the connection between truck and trailer. Silence, for a moment that we all seemed to feel forever as we rushed over to the spot that my father had to have fallen-none of us had actually seen any such event. We came to see the groaning mass of my father in the dirt, his head inches away from the solid metal ball-shaped hitch used to connect various cargo in the process of transportation, fearing the sight of blood. Thankfully, none was present, and we each expressed our worried concern for him, in turn, asking the usual "are you okay?", "are you alright?", "what happened?". He finally told us to relax, for he had simply taken a little tumble from the top of the wagon, not hitting anything on his way down but the fairly hard dirt and grass below. He staggered a bit, my mother warning him of a possible

concussion. He insisted on continuing work, and we drove back to our own house with the hay in tow, without incident. We put every single bale of hay up into the second floor of our barn, again, without incident. Nothing seemed off most of the night. Finally, we were all sitting back down to watch some TV and eat our supper, when the topic of his fall was brought up to him again. At this point, we had already grilled him on his physical and mental well-being multiple times, reminding him of the various celebrities and athletes that had died or been injured from serious and undiagnosed concussions, the most prominent being the reminder that Liam Neeson's wife had passed away from a very mild concussion that she had not gone to a doctor for. She simply fell asleep and never woke up. Needless to say, we did not want the same to happen to our father, no matter how stubborn he could be. He refused to go to a doctor, and eventually, the issue passed and we all fell asleep, getting up the next day just as fine as the one before it.

There was a minute difference in all of us, especially in me. My mother would still look out for us, perhaps a little more aggressively; my sister would sometimes remind him of the event when he warned her about doing anything dangerous; my father would actually never really recall how that event went-he never could recite the exact details of that day, it was fuzzy for him from then on. I would always play a little less intensely with my father, always watch him from the corner of my eye when we worked on anything particularly taxing, always remembering the day he fell, and remembering how much fear I felt. I still fear a fall, a fall that we all will take, but one we never could expect our invincible guardians to suffer. A shock to the system that defines how we view the world around us. I fear that inevitable fall.